

BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

Election of Patriarch Postponed Indefinitely by Turkish Government

For almost five months now, the Turkish state has refused to approve an election date permitting the 80,000-strong Armenian community, Turkey's largest Christian minority, to proceed with the election of the 84th hierarch of the 537-year old Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey.

Since Patriarch Karekin II's death in early March (AIM April-May 1998), 45 representatives from 38 districts in Turkey have met at the Armenian Patriarchate and elected a 21-member Electoral Committee responsible for organizing the elections.

An important task of the Committee is to negotiate with the Istanbul Governor's Office for permission to hold church elections.

The last two patriarchal elections in 1961 and 1990 were carried out by the Patriarchal Elections Directorate, only after being ratified by the Turkish Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1961.

As the Electoral Committee started the organization of the election, an April 28 letter from the Istanbul Governor's Office ordered a halt in the church's plans until further notice and with no explanations.

It has become obvious that the government's interference in the election process goes beyond setting procedures. Through various informal channels, the Armenian community has been informed that between the two eligible candidates the Turkish state prefers Archbishop Shahan Sivajian, 72, over charismatic and well-educated Archbishop Mesrob Mutafyan, 42. Meanwhile, a direct slander campaign in the rightist Turkish media has been launched against Mutafyan, accusing him of anti-Turkish activities. In one case, Mutafyan promptly filed and won a lawsuit for libel against *Turkiye*. The paper still refuses to obey court orders to print a retraction.

In May, *Turkiye*-owned TGRT television broadcast more allegations against Mutafyan, claiming that the government was very concerned about his candidacy and preferred Sivajian as the new patriarch.

In early August, Mutafyan was duly elected *Locum Tenens* and Acting Patriarch. However, the government refused to recognize Mutafyan and stated that under Turkish law the eldest and most senior cleric in line for patriarch—Sivajian—must fill the interim post until a successor is elected.

The Patriarchate protested the state's orders to no avail. Instead, the government retaliated with two more memos declaring Sivajian the only recognized interim leader and warning that any resistance to this decision would be prosecuted under the criminal codes.

Turkey's Foreign Ministry, mindful that state interference in church affairs will create a bad public image for Turkey abroad, reportedly opposes the unwarranted moves of the Interior Ministry.

The rights of Christian minorities in Turkey are guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923. However, as Turkish commentator Sibel Utku writes, "Unfortunately, [the] provisions have been breached by Turkish authorities and have repeatedly put Turkey in a difficult position in the international arena."

By HRATCH TCHILINGIRIAN



bytes on file

Number of Armenians living in Japan
200

Number of Armenian churches in Turkey
33

Number of years since 1989 that Armenia's immigration-emigration balance has been negative
5

Number of years since 1989 that Azerbaijan's immigration-emigration balance has been negative
9

Number of CIS countries besides Russia and Belarus with a positive immigration-emigration balance during the last 9 years
0

Number of Armenian men from Karabakh who died fighting for the Soviet Union in World War II
22,000

Number of Azerbaijanis who left Yerevan in 1988
2,300

Number of Armenian schools shut down in Baku during World War II
76

Number of Armenians in Baku in the 1970s just when the Armenian theater, cultural center, television programming were closed
215,000

Number of nationalities residing in the Autonomous Republic of Dagestan in Russia (just north of Azerbaijan)
20

Number of professionally trained accountants needed in Armenia today
45,000

New York Times, Economist, International Organization for Migration, Armenia's Minister of Statistics, Gha-ra-bagh